

# what we found

## in brief:

Some of the findings from the scheme.



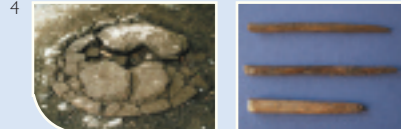
1. Rim sherd  
Rim sherd of decorated prehistoric pottery from **Dunboyne**.



2. Medieval pottery  
13th-century AD pottery from **Merrywell**.



3. Bone comb  
Bone comb fragment from **Roestown**.



4. Millstone  
Millstone re-used as wheel-former at **Philpotstown**.



5. Bone needles or pins  
Three bone needles or pins found at **Roestown**.

# background

The M3 Clonee-North of Kells Road Scheme is approximately 60km long but with a significant quantity of additional link roads, covering a total of approximately 700ha. The route commences at **Clonee** on the border between **Dublin** and **Meath** with link roads to **Dunboyne**, **Dunshaughlin**, **Navan** and **Kells**. It joins the existing N3 north of Kells near the border between **Meath** and **Cavan**.

Extensive archaeological work has taken place on the whole of the planned M3 route, including desktop survey, field survey, geophysical survey, aerial survey and extensive test excavation. The programme of archaeological testing was undertaken in 2004 by **Archaeological Consultancy Services Ltd (A.C.S. Ltd.)** and **Irish Archaeological Consultancy Ltd.**, on behalf of the **National Roads Authority** and **Meath County Council**. The archaeological investigations to date have revealed approximately 160 new sites along the whole route.



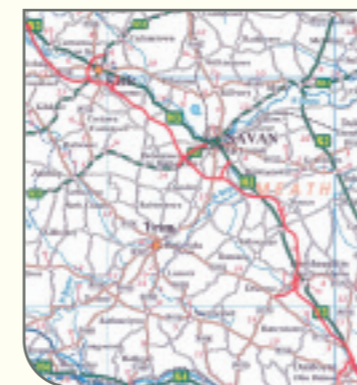
Aerial view of backfilled test trenches at **Dowdstown** with the **River Boyne** and **Ballinter Bridge**.

Archaeological excavation of these sites commenced in autumn 2005 and work is ongoing. As the majority of sites have not yet been absolutely dated interpretation at this stage is provisional and may change when excavation and further research on the sites is complete. The results of the investigations to date are presented on a dedicated website [www.m3motorway.ie](http://www.m3motorway.ie)

M3 CLONEE-NORTH OF KELLS MOTORWAY SCHEME,  
County Meath



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# archaeological DISCOVERIES

## front cover images

LEFT: Medieval green glazed pottery jug handle found during testing at Garretstown. (Photo A.C.S. Ltd.)  
RIGHT: Polished stone axe fragment uncovered at Dunboyne.  
MIDDLE: Archaeologist recording the foundations of the 19th-century post-office at Philpotstown. (Photo StudioLab)



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# prehistoric

The majority of sites discovered are currently interpreted as prehistoric. Most of these are burnt mounds but there are also a large number currently classified as settlement or industrial sites and a number of burial sites.

The function of some sites is somewhat enigmatic such as the apparently isolated pits at **Dunboyne** from which a substantial amount of Neolithic pottery and flint were recovered.

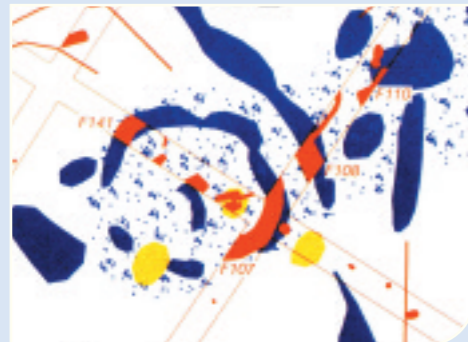
Excavation of medieval field ditches in another area of **Dunboyne** revealed an earlier circular building of probable Bronze Age date. The finds recovered included a fragment of a large stone axe, which may have been imported from Cumbria in Britain.

Ring-ditches are the most common burial site

identified on the M3, however further investigation of numerous possible cremation pits may show that unenclosed burials outnumber ring-ditches. Modern agricultural practices have largely removed any upstanding features that may have been associated with these monuments. Evidence that a mound did exist was identified in the geophysical survey of a ring-ditch at **Ardsallagh**, which shows a field boundary respecting the ring-ditch by curving around it. This ring-ditch (11m diameter) of probable Bronze Age to Iron Age date had cremations and extended inhumations both inside and outside this enclosure. One of the cremations contained in an urn was located outside the ring-ditch within a pit, which was badly truncated by ploughing.



Bronze Age roundhouse and medieval field system uncovered at **Dunboyne**. (Photo Hawkeye)



Ring-ditch respected by later field boundary as revealed by geophysical survey and testing at **Ardsallagh**. (Figure GSB Prospection & A.C.S. Ltd.)

# early medieval

Recent discoveries on NRA projects elsewhere in Ireland have demonstrated that in addition to classic early medieval site-types, such as ringforts, crannógs and ecclesiastical enclosures, other nucleated or village-like settlement forms existed in early medieval Ireland.

Most of these sites also produce burials, indicating a more complex site use. There have been several discoveries on the M3 that may represent similar exciting evidence for early medieval settlements,

including two enclosure complexes identified by geophysical survey at **Roestown** and **Dowdstown**.

The large enclosure complex at **Roestown**, which is bisected by the existing N3, is situated on a slight terrace adjacent to what was formerly Redbog, approximately 3km from **Lagore crannóg**. The main focus of the site consists of a large D-shaped enclosure (max width c.70m) with a number of internal divisions and external annexes, some of which are likely to have been animal enclosures. Finds from the early stages of excavation include bone pin fragments, a bone comb fragment and a possible bone needle holder:



Bone needle holder from **Roestown**.

# early medieval

A similar extensive multi-enclosure site is located immediately south of the **River Boyne** at **Dowdstown**. Again the main focus of the site is a large D-shaped enclosure (max width c.60m) which appears to have been expanded from a smaller circular enclosure (c. 40m diameter). Attached to this D-shaped enclosure is a larger rectilinear enclosure that may have functioned as an animal pen. Finds from the early stages of excavation include the shaft of a bronze ring-pin - a typical type of early medieval dress fastener.



Bronze ring-pin from **Dowdstown**.

# medieval



Turned ash wood bowl from **Merrywell**.

The majority of townland names in Meath are Anglo-Norman or English forms, many containing personal names such as **Garretstown**. This is not surprising considering the extent of colonial settlement in Meath nor is it surprising that a number of medieval sites have been identified on the M3, including the field system in **Dunboyne**.

Excavation of another medieval field system and well in the townland of **Merrywell**, west of **Dunshaughlin**, has produced a large amount of 13th-century pottery and a turned ash wood bowl.

# medieval



Lignite bracelet fragment from **Castlefarm**.

A settlement initially identified by geophysical survey at **Castlefarm** just south of **Dunboyne** was provisionally identified as medieval and possibly associated with the original Anglo-Norman manor there. Testing uncovered a group of pits, postholes, deposits and ditches defined to the south by a large ditch containing much animal bone, charcoal and some metalworking waste. Worked antler and a portion of a bone pin were also recovered. However artefacts from the early stages of excavation such as a lignite bracelet fragment indicate that the site may be of early medieval date.

# early modern

The early modern sites include the foundations of vernacular structures, such as the 19th-century post-office and smithy alongside the existing N3 road at **Philpotstown**. A broken millstone, possibly re-used as a wheel-former was uncovered in front of the smithy. Upstanding vernacular buildings that will be architecturally recorded include this mud-walled building at **Merrywell**.



Mud-walled vernacular structure at **Merrywell**.